

**The Murder of
Private Edward Gibson
Ulster Defence Regiment
on 26th April 1988**



**Recognition and Acknowledgment
for Victims and Survivors
of Terrorism**

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Introduction

In 1988, 105 people were killed in the Northern Ireland Troubles. Of those, 12 were soldiers of the Ulster Defence Regiment, 1 was a Prison Officer, 6 were officers of the Royal Ulster Constabulary and 27 were soldiers in the British Army/ Airforce and Navy.

It was a very turbulent year with many notorious killings taking place. It was 1988 when the Special Air Service (SAS) ambushed three IRA members in Gibraltar with the knock on of the Michael Stone shootings at Milltown Cemetery and the murders of the two army Corporals, Derek Wood and David Howes. Three RAF soldiers were murdered in two separate incidents in the Netherlands in May of that year. Quickly followed in June when 6 off duty British soldiers were killed when a booby trap device exploded under the van in which they were travelling, and in August, 8 British soldiers were murdered in a landmine attack at Ballygawley.

**Ulster Defence Regiment
Private Edward Gibson
Husband, Father, Son and Brother
Murdered in Coagh on 26th April 1988**



Ned Gibson was born and reared in the small County Tyrone village of Coagh. He lived with his parents, Betty and Stewart, and his 4 brothers and 1 sister. Ned was the youngest in the family. He attended school in Coagh before travelling to Cookstown to attend Secondary School.

He left school at just over 15 years of age and began an apprenticeship in welding at Omagh Training Centre.

Ned, met his wife Wendy at a function in November 1981 when he was only 16 years old. They fell in love and were engaged to be married within 6 months.

The couple married in Edenderry Presbyterian Church, Omagh on 14th April 1984 and had their daughter Marlene, on 11th March 1985.

At the time of his death, Ned was the sole breadwinner in the house, while Wendy remained at home to care for their baby daughter.

To make things financially better for his family, Ned joined the Ulster Defence Regiment part-time and had just completed 6 weeks of UDR training. He had only been on the job for two weeks when he was brutally shot down in front of his colleagues while he carried out his full-time job.

Ned was the seventh member of the Ulster Defence Regiment to be murdered in 1988.

The Day of The Murder

Wendy recalls the day of Ned's murder to have started as normal. He had been on duty with the UDR the night before, and left the following morning, as was his routine, to go to his full-time job as a Council employee. Wendy was still in bed when Ned left that day, though he returned shortly after to leave bags in the house, Wendy watched Ned from the window as he drove away for the second time that morning.ⁱ

Ned's role was "casual" so he would not have known what his work day would have been until he arrived at the Depot. That day he was appointed to the Coagh area as a refuse collector.

Ned was shot and killed while carrying out his job sometime around mid-day on Tuesday 26th April 1988.

In his Deposition a witness to Ned's murder stated:

On 26.4.88 at about 11.45am I was in the field beside my house checking cattle..... All of a sudden, these two men came up behind me. I was in the field but close to the road. These men were both about the same height and build, about 5' 7" and medium build. They were both wearing black woollen masks with eyeholes cut out and were carrying identical guns, rifles with brown butts and a magazine. Both were wearing hip length camouflaged jackets and dark trousers. I think they were wearing boots. One told me to come over to him and he told me he was from the IRA. He said he wanted to stay in my house a while and that he wanted my car..... I told them they were not getting into my house or getting my car. I told them they could shoot me if they wanted but they weren't getting it. As they were about to walk on the same fella said to me to keep my friggin car we want your house. I watched the two masked men walk towards my house which was approximately 100 yards away. They jumped over the wire into my garden at the side of my house and then went round the back of the house and disappeared from view. When these people first approached me I did not see them get out of a car. I even thought they were hiding in the hedge. I stayed down in the field because I was scared. I knew that the house was locked and they wouldn't get into the house. I was looking up towards the house and about five minutes later I saw the bin lorry come down towards my house from the main road. I then heard two shots. Then almost immediately the bin lorry drove out from my house very fast".ⁱⁱ

Ned had been part of a four-man team that day working on the bin lorry. All three colleagues witnessed his murder. The driver was able to give a detailed statement on their route and said in his deposition:

"I started work this morning at about 8am starting from the Yard in Cookstown at the Burn Road. and Edward Gibson were on the run with me. They were the We started lifting bins at Killybearn. I had driven to Killybearn out to Coagh Road from Cookstown, then did Ardtrea area, Kingsmill Road area, Lisnahall area, then to Urbal Road direction. We did the main road, Coagh, Battery Road, bearing off at the "Y" junction just the other side of Coagh. We did Ballinderry Bridge area and Derrychrin area at the estate. We did in round Annaghmore area. We did near Lavery's Pub where we turned right and did the estate. We came back out of the estate and turned right at Lavery's Bar and took the first road on the left – this would be at Anneter Road. was in the cab with me at this stage and and Edward Gibson were standing on the back step of the lorry. Eddie had been inside the cab of the lorry for about one hour since we left the Council Yard. From the Urbal Road he had been out for a period until Derrychrin. We drove up the Anneter Road. Eddie Gibson and were outside on the back of the lorry and was inside the cab.

Of Ned's murder, he said:

" I was sitting in the cab. was in the cab with me. and Eddie were outside. I heard shooting. I looked round. This must have been around quarter to twelve. I saw two persons running from the right- hand gable of the house that we had stopped at. The lorry was parked convenient to the front driveway. These two persons were masked and had rifles. I would say these two persons were not actually running but walking and shooting at the same time. Their rifles were pointed to the back of the bin lorry. They kept firing. There was a small wall at the front of the house. I saw Eddie getting down behind it. I did not see at this stage. Eddie seemed to fall at the wall. The gunmen came right out from the driveway and fired into Eddie's body. They were about three or four yards away from Eddie. I saw Eddie's body falling back. Eddie had a grey bodywarmer on him and I could see what looked like bullets tearing into his body. This all happened very quickly. I drove the lorry on towards the Lough".

He described the gunmen as:

"Both these men were of average build, perhaps 5'10" or 5'11" both the rifles were black colour as far as I saw. Both them as far as I can say may have had plain green type combat jackets on. I can't describe them any further. The masks which were dark were right down to their shoulders".ⁱⁱⁱ

One of the other men working Ned's bin run that day and who witnessed his murder, concurred what Wendy had said about him not knowing what jobs he would have been assigned to on the day of his murder. He said:

"The fourth person was Eddie Gibson who was the extra man detailed for today's run. We would not have known who the extra man was until I went into the Council offices this morning. This is the first time that Eddie Gibson had been on the lorry with me on this run. We are not told who is on with us. As far as I can say there was never any set pattern as to who was going with us."^{iv}

Another witness who had been travelling behind the bin lorry in their own car and witnessed Ned's murder also gave a Deposition stating:

"I saw the two binmen get off the tailboard and then I saw two men running out from the side of the house. Both of these men were masked and were both carrying long barrelled guns. I was still waiting behind the lorry and knew it was only a short distance to my house so I hadn't tried to pass. I heard about 6 or 7 shots and then the two gunmen came over to my car. They told me to get out of the car and went over a lot of bad talk. I thought I was going to be shot myself. I tried to get out and got stuck in the seat belt getting out. The two men were very excited and were shouting at me to get out quick. They were in a bit of a state and liable to do anything. I didn't see what happened the bin lorry and I thought the two binmen were dead. I just got out of the car and walked back towards the main road."^v

The witness went on to say that a neighbour came to them and brought them to safety. The neighbour then phoned for the Police and ambulance service.

At present there is no evidence to show as to who was the first responders to the scene of Ned's murder.

However, we do know that a local GP was called to the scene shortly after the shooting and said;

"On Tuesday 26 April 1988 I was called to the scene of a fatal shooting incident at 15 Anneter Road, Coagh. I arrived at the scene at 12.10pm. I there saw the body of the deceased. The position that he was in was that his head and upper back were against a small wall which surrounded the house and his legs were facing across the road. I looked for evident signs of life viz checked for breathing etc. and also noticed that the pupils of his eyes were dilated and fixed. I saw that he had multiple chest wounds. I also felt for a carotid pulse but there was no sign of respiration. I knew the deceased to be Edward Gibson of (), Coagh. Edward was a patient at my surgery. Life was pronounced extinct on the deceased at 12.10pm approximately"^{vi}

Ned Gibson was murdered no more than 6 miles from home.

On the 30th anniversary of Neds death, Wendy said in an interview with the Belfast News Letter that:

She was back at home, and learned of the attack when a local man called Leslie Dallas (who was later to die at the hands of the IRA), called to say that two men were looking for her.

The men were from the UDR, and Wendy's first thought was: "What has he done now?!" "We sat on the sofa, and they started to say: 'Your husband has been fatally wounded.'

"I said: 'Well ... is he alright?'

"I wasn't picking up the word 'fatal'. I was picking up the word 'wounded'.

"In my mind he was wounded, and they were there to take me to the hospital.

"It wasn't registering. I just fixed my eyes on the clock.

"Then for some reason I said: 'My mum's only dead three weeks.' And I went into hysterics."^{vii}

Sadly, Ned's mum heard of a shooting while she was out visiting. She returned to the devastating news that it was her son Ned who had been killed.

Wendy next saw Ned's body when she went to the morgue with other family members.



The Anneter Road today.

The Funeral of Ned Gibson

Ned was buried from home. Wendy remembers the days beforehand being filled with family, friends and neighbours calling to the house to share their feelings of loss and disbelief at Ned's murder. Both the Reverend Ian Paisley and the Reverend William McCrea attended the house.

The funeral was conducted both by the family and the Ulster Defence Regiment. Ned was given a UDR headstone, which has since been joined by a headstone erected by Wendy and Marlene with their own personal inscription.

Wendy remembers with fondness the kindness shown to her at and after Ned's death. She recalled memories of things like coal and milk being left for her and Marlene. She has kept all the sympathy cards they were sent to this day.

soldier

EDWARD GIBSON — the UDR soldier gunned down by the IRA yesterday — had only joined the regiment eight weeks ago.

The 22-year-old part-time soldier — known locally as Ned — was shot at point-blank range.

He was working at his civilian job, refuse collector, near Coagh, Co Tyrone when he was murdered. It was his first bin collection in the fiercely republican area of Ardboe.

By KEVIN MAGEE

The bin crew stopped to collect refuse at a remote cottage at Moortown, Ardboe, on the shores of Lough Neagh when two gunmen singled Mr Gibson out and opened fire.

As he lay bleeding on the ground, the killers moved closer to their victim, and pumped more shots into his body.

Despite a frantic attempt by colleagues to give him first aid, Mr Gibson died almost immediately.

His killers escaped after hijacking a passing car, a Fiat. It was later found abandoned at a public house near the Old Cross in Ardboe — only a short distance from the murder scene.

The IRA said it killed the UDR man.

Mr Gibson, from Hanover Terrace, Coagh, had just celebrated his fourth wedding anniversary.

He leaves a widow, and three year-old daughter, Marlene. His wife Wendy was too upset to talk last night.

Her uncle, who was a part-time RUC reservist, was shot dead several years ago. He was at the wheel of a Milk

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Inquest of Ned Gibson

The Inquest into the death of Ned was held at The Courthouse in Cookstown on Wednesday 14th December 1988. The cause of death was recorded as:

“Bullet wounds of head and trunk”.

The findings read:

“Edward Gibson male aged 23 years went to work on Tuesday 26/4/88 where he was appointed to the Coagh area as a refuse collector. Whilst attending to his work at a house at 15 Annater Road he was shot at approximately 12.10pm. Death caused by gunshot wounds to head and body”

Form 22

VERDICT ON INQUEST
CORONERS ACT (NORTHERN IRELAND) 1959

On an inquest taken for our Sovereign Lady the Queen, at the Courthouse, Cookstown
on wednesday the 14th day of December 1988,
[and by adjournment on the 19th day of 1988]
before me John Heenan, Coroner for the
District of East Tyrone.
touching the death of Edward Gibson
the following matters were found:

1. Name and surname: EDWARD GIBSON.
2. Sex: male
3. Date of death: 26th April 1988
4. Place of death: 15 Annater Road, Coagh.
5. Usual address (if different from place of death): [REDACTED]
6. Marital Status: married
7. Date and place of birth: 11th July 1965 at Mid Ulster Hospital, Magherafelt.
8. Occupation: Council Worker + part time U.D.R.
9. Maiden surname (of woman who had married): N/A.
10. Cause of death: I. (a) Bullet wounds of head + trunk.
or
or
II
11. Findings: Edward Gibson male aged 23 years went to work on Tuesday 26/4/88 where he was appointed to the Coagh area as a refuse collector. Whilst attending to his work at a house at 15 Annater Road he was shot at approx 12.10 pm. Death caused by gunshot wounds to head + body

The Investigation into Ned's Murder

According to Ned's Inquest File, the first RUC responders were a Detective Constable and Detective Chief Inspector Stewart attached to CID South Region.^{viii}

A Detective Inspector based at CID South Region took charge of the investigation into Ned's murder. At present, it is unknown if this was D/Chief Inspector Stewart.

The Detective Constable stated:

"At 12.29pm on 26 April 1988 I went to 15 Anneter Road, Coagh, the scene of a fatal shooting incident, accompanied by Detective Chief Inspector Stewart. There I carried out enquiries into the shooting and established that Edward Gibson, DOB 17 7 65, Council Employee, 4 Hanover Terrace, Urbal Road, Coagh, had been fatally wounded by terrorist gunmen. The body of the deceased was identified to me at the scene by At 2 30pm on 27 April 1988 I went to the Mortuary Department at Mid Ulster Hospital, Magherafelt. I identified the body of the deceased to Doctor Press, State Pathologist who carried out a Post Mortem".^{ix}

An RUC Scenes of Crime Officer was on the scene by 1.05pm. He stated in his Deposition:

"On 26 April 1988 as the result of a telephone conversation I made my way to 15 Anneter Road, Coagh arriving at 1.05pm. There I met with other police and after a conversation with them began an examination of the roadway outside the grounds of No. 15. On the roadway I found the body of a male person lying with the head and shoulders against a low wall close to the entrance. There was a dustbin between the body and the entrance. I located 10 x cases on a roughly circular pattern distributed on the roadway around the body. On going into the drive of No 15 which leads along the gable I located another empty case and at the rear of the dwelling a further case was located. A foot mark on a flower-bed running the length of the drive was also found. Afterwards I made my way into a field to the North of No 15 where I made tape/fibre lift JLC 3 from barbed wire in a gap in the hedge. I continued into the next field where I recovered a hessian sock (JLC4). In a laneway at the Northern end of this field I located two footmarks in sand. These were later photographed by Sergeant as was the footmark, found in the flower-bed at no 15. Afterwards I returned to the roadway outside No 15 and after the body had been removed I examined the wall and roadway. On the wall I found 4 x marks consistent with bullet strike marks and I also recovered fragments of bullets from the roadway. JLC2. When photographing and mapping branches had completed their tasks I recovered the 12 x cases. (JLC1)".^x

He stated that he submitted all exhibits to the Northern Ireland Forensic Science Laboratories.

(The Forensic Science Laboratory was on the Newtownbreda Road, Belfast. The Provisional IRA detonated a 3,000lb bomb on 19th September 1992 causing a huge explosion and massive damage, both to the Labs and a nearby housing estate. The Forensic Science Lab was a key target as it analysed evidence relating to terrorist cases. A substantial number of forensic evidence exhibits from historical and ongoing cases were lost).

An RUC Sergeant in the Photography Branch based in RUC Gough, Armagh was also present at the scene. He stated:

“On the 26 4 88 at 3.15pm I went to Anneter Road, Coagh and there at the request of D/Chief Inspector Stewart I photographed the scene of a fatal shooting. At 4.45pm I went to Ardboe Road, Coagh and photographed where a Fiat car () had been recovered. At 5.15pm I went to the Airport Road, Kinrush, Coagh and there photographed two weapons which had been found”.

During the Inquest, The Detective Inspector in charge of the investigation said:

“I am a Detective Inspector of the Royal Ulster Constabulary attached to CID Southern Region. Since the 26 April 1988 I have been in charge of the investigation into the murder of Edward Gibson, shot dead at Anneter Road, Coagh on that date. To date no persons have been made amenable. Enquiries are still continuing in an effort to bring those persons responsible to justice. The murder has been claimed by East Tyrone Provisional IRA”.

The East Tyrone Brigade of the Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA), also known as the Tyrone/Monaghan Brigade was one of the most active republican paramilitary groups in Northern Ireland during "the Troubles". It is believed to have drawn its membership from across the eastern side of County Tyrone as well as north County Monaghan and south County Londonderry.^{xi}

Ned's wife and daughter, have never received an Historical Enquiries Team Review into Ned's murder due to the HET ceasing to operate on 31st December 2014.

However, in a letter received from Detective Chief Superintendent Brian Hanna, in December 2014, he reassured the family that an HET review had taken place. Unfortunately, they found that it had:

“not yielded any new evidence or investigative opportunities”.

He also informed them that because of the imminent closure of the HET, it was impossible to supply them with the report.

The murder of Ned now awaits review by the Legacy Investigation Branch of the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

TO DATE, NO ONE HAS EVER BEEN CHARGED WITH ANY OFFENCE IN CONNECTION WITH NED'S MURDER.

The Gibson Family Today

Ned's widow Wendy and daughter Marlene, became beneficiaries of Ulster Human Rights Watch in May 2014. They both remain hurt and frustrated that no one has been made to answer for the murder of their husband and father, as does the wider family circle.

Although an HET Review was conducted into Ned's murder, they never received the report due to the timing of its closure.

Even though they have been waiting for 31 years, they are still hopeful that Ned's murder will be further reviewed by the Legacy Investigation's Branch or by whatever mechanism is put in to replace the LIB.

Ulster Human Rights Watch, on behalf of the Gibson family, wrote to the Historical Enquiries Team for an update on their intention to review the circumstances of Ned's murder. This request was made in May 2014. A reply was received in June, saying Ned's murder had been re-allocated and once the suspension of the HET work was lifted, they would be in touch with the Gibson family. In December of 2014, a further letter was received stating that the HET was ceasing operations by 31st December that year. They did inform the family that an:

"HET Review of the police investigation into Edward's murder has been completed. It has not yielded any new evidence or investigative opportunities".

"It is with regret that I have to tell you that with the imminent closure of the HET it is impossible to produce such a report at this time. The completion of this report will become part of the Legacy Branch caseload".

The Legacy Investigation Branch, was set up by the Police Service of Northern Ireland to review historical cases.

Since then, Ulster Human Rights Watch applied for and received a copy of Ned's Inquest File. The Advocacy Support Worker, has spent time studying this information and relaying it back to the family. This has been a source of unknown information for Wendy and Marlene, and has given them the opportunity to pose various questions to the Legacy Investigation Branch about the circumstances on the day Ned was murdered and on the following investigation.

For example, we posed the following question since the Inquest file included a statement from a Sergeant in the RUC Photography Branch stating he had photographed two weapons found a few hours after Ned's murder:

"Mrs and Ms Gibson would like to know if these two weapons are still in the possession of the Police Service of Northern Ireland and if so, could they be informed that this is the case".

This question was asked in October 2015. A reply was received from HET Detective Superintendent almost a year later in August 2016. He said:

"I have reviewed the material held by the Historical Enquiries Team and can confirm that the two weapons referred to were the subject of a disposal order in 1995 and the weapons are therefore no longer in police possession".

Needless to say, both Wendy and Marlene find it difficult to understand why weapons linked to the unsolved murder of Ned would be disposed of.

They both also feel very uneasy about the fact that Ned was the "extra" man on the bin run that day. He went to work that morning not knowing what tasks he would have been allocated to do. Therefore, who knew that he would be on the bin lorry and on that particular route? His murder was obviously well planned and executed. How would the terrorists have known he would be there?

In a letter received in January 2017, the Legacy Investigation Branch wrote to Ulster Human Rights Watch informing that Ned's murder case formed:

"part of the Legacy Investigation Branch caseload. This caseload extends to over 1000 cases and it is not possible at this stage to provide a timescale for the commencement of these reviews".

The family continues to wait.

According to Wendy, rumours abounded as to who was responsible for Ned's murder. She said in a Belfast News Letter article marking the 30th anniversary of Ned's murder:

***“... no-one was ever arrested over the murder.
However, she believes her husband's killers were themselves later shot dead.
“It's hearsay,” she said.
“But I wanted to believe that, because it was easier. Do you understand what I mean?
“It's easier to cope with knowing they've been got for it, than that person maybe walking
into the surgery and being sweet and nice to me at work, and they are the one who
murdered my husband.”***

Wendy and Marlene continue to receive the support from Ulster Human Rights Watch in their fight for recognition and justice in the murder of their husband and father.

Wendy, has also found comfort through the support she receives from other groups of which she has been an active member. These include The Widows Association, Wave Trauma Centre and MUVE (Mid Ulster Victims Empowerment).

Through their grief, they have found an outlet in sharing their story with others. Wendy shared her story on “Stories from Silence” with Wave Trauma Centre. Marlene bravely spoke on “Strong to Survive” a compilation of victim's stories who were members of the Orange Order.

It is Wendy and Marlene's hope and drive that those nameless faces behind their dearly loved husband and father's murder will someday face justice.

Writings and Memorials

Details from our Roll of Honour

UDR and R IRISH (HS) Aftercare Service

Soldiers Name: Edward Gibson **Other Names:** **Also Known As:** Ned
Marital Status : Married **Age at Death:** 22 **Civilian Job:** Council Worker

Service Details

Enlistment Date: 29/02/1988 **Service No:** 24715186 **Rank:** Pte
Regiment: UDR **Battalion:** 8 UDR **Company:** C Company
Service Type: Part Time

Details of Incident

On or Off Duty: Off **Date of Death:** 26/04/1988
County: Tyrone **Location:** Ardboe

Details:

Shot by the IRA as he collected dustbins. Two gunmen fired and continued to fire as he lay on the ground. He had been given irregular shifts at his own request as a security measure and only knew that morning that he would be working in that area. Edward had joined the Regiment just eight weeks earlier. 174th UDR soldier to be killed.

The above details are as known and currently held in the UDR and R IRISH (HS) Roll of Honour Database. If you know of any errors please **contact us** and we will amend the record as soon as possible. Thank you.



Soldiers Details

Shared from the UDR and R IRISH Aftercare Service website

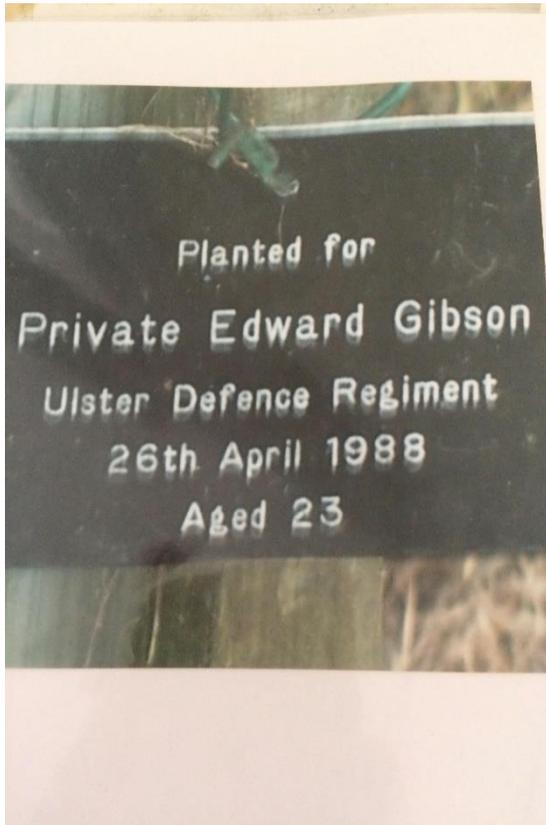
Ned is also remembered at St Lukes Church, Tamlaght Parish, Ruskey Road Coagh. A tablet was unveiled on 22nd October 1989. It reads:

**TO THE GLORY OF GOD
AND IN MEMORY OF
PTE EDWARD(NED)
GIBSON
C COY 7TH (CO,
TYRONE) BATTALION
ULSTER DEFENCE REGIMENT
MURDERED BY TERRORISTS
26TH APRIL 1988
AGED 23 YEARS
THEY SHALL NOT GROW OLD
AS WE THAT ARE LEFT GROW OLD
ERECTED BY HIS COMRADES.**



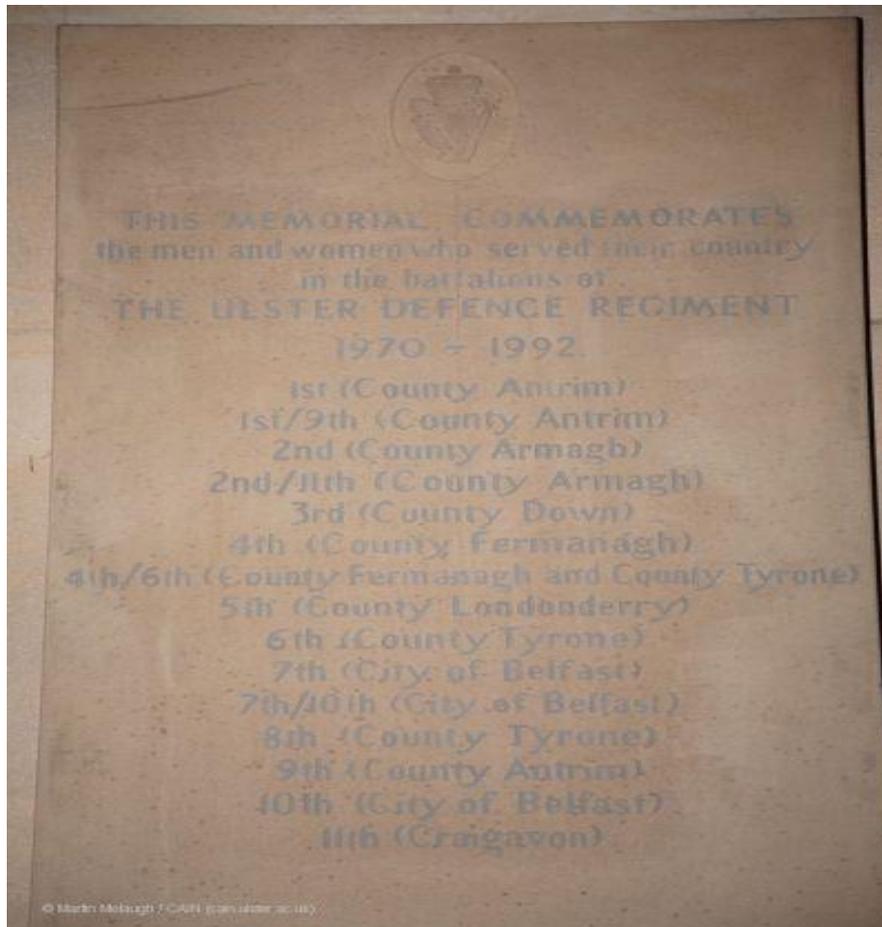
This memorial is at the Ulster Grove at the National Memorial Arboretum, Alrewas, Staffordshire. There are no names inscribed on the memorial. It is in

memory to all those murdered whilst serving with the Ulster Defence Regiment.



Wendy shared these photos taken at National *Memorial Arboretum, Alrewas, Staffordshire, England*. Its objective is to honour the fallen, recognise service and sacrifice, and foster pride in the British Armed Forces and civilian community.

Ned is also remembered on the UDR Plaque, placed in St Anne's Cathedral, Belfast in remembrance of all those who died while serving in the Ulster Defence Regiment.



Lost Lives is:

“A unique work filled with passion and violence, with humanity and inhumanity. It is the story of the Northern Ireland Troubles...”

It reads:

April 26, 1988

Edward Gibson, Tyrone

UDR, Protestant, 23, married, 1 child,

Council worker

A part-time member of the regiment, he was shot by the IRA as he was collecting dustbins for Cookstown Borough Council near Ardboe. He had been about to lift a bin at a bungalow on Aneeter Road when two gunmen appeared and opened fire as they walked towards him. Private Gibson tried to get down behind a small wall but the gunmen fired more shots into him as he lay on the ground. The owner of the bungalow was held up by the gunmen minutes before the arrival of the bin lorry. A man who lived nearby said: "The Victim was lying propped up against the Wall of a house. By the time an ambulance arrived he was already dead". An Inquest in December 1988 was told that the part-time Soldier was the extra man on the lorry that Day and that he had only known this when He turned up for work. He had been given Irregular shifts at his own request as a Safety measure after he had joined the UDR. The killers' getaway car was found Near Ardboe Old Cross. Two high-powered Rifles were found near the scene of the Shooting in a follow-up security force Search. They had been hidden in an Embankment at a disused airfield about a Mile from Aneeter Road. Edward Gibson, who was from Urbal Road, Coagh, had been a member of the UDR for eight weeks. He had a three-year-old daughter.

CAIN Archive:

26 April 1988

Gibson, Edward (22) Protestant

Status: Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR), killed by: Irish republican Army (IRA)

Off duty. Shot while working as bin man, Moortown, near Ardboe, County Tyrone.

On the 30th anniversary of his murder the Belfast News Letter published the following article with Wendy's interview.

By age 16 Edward Gibson had met his wife-to-be. By age 18 he was married. And by age 22 he was dead.

It is now 30 years since the young council worker was killed by the IRA as he collected bins in east Tyrone, and his widow has used the opportunity to speak out about his life, death, and the family's struggle to continue without him.

Whilst the killing of the new UDR recruit may have sunk from the public memory, she told of the grief she still endures, even if no-one outside the family "really cares".

The News Letter approached her as part of an occasional feature looking at some of the less-known victims of the Troubles, and she said that she has never spoken in such detail about the killing before.

THE MAN:

Born in the little village of Coagh, Edward Gibson was one of five children. He left Cookstown High at 16, and followed many of his family members into the Orange Order about a year later.

He was almost always called 'Ned'.

"He only got 'Edward' if he'd done something wrong," said Wendy.

They first met in Omagh's Birches hotel where Ned (who was a virtual teetotaler) "very cheekily pinged my bra while I was at the bar".

Wendy scolded him and thought no more of it. But next week they ran into one another again, shared a dance, and started to go out.

He was 16 at the time and she 18. And just five months later, they were engaged.

They got a house together in Coagh, had a daughter named Marlene, and Ned secured a council job sweeping roads, cutting grass, and collecting bins.

As the sole breadwinner at the time he also took a job in the UDR, in large part to earn a bit of extra cash.

THE MURDER:

On the day of his death – April 26, 1988 – Ned had done six weeks of UDR training and had been a fully fledged member for just a fortnight.

He had no personal weapon.

He left for work at about 8am, after his usual breakfast of 7UP and a cigarette.

Wendy estimated that the shooting took place about three hours later.

Her understanding is two gunmen approached a Catholic man who lived in a house in Ardboe, about four miles away, and asked for car keys.

The householder refused.

The gunmen proceeded with their plan regardless, lying in wait for the bin lorry nearby.

As Ned dismounted and lifted a bin, the killers opened fire.

“They apparently called him by his name,” said Wendy.

“As far as I can remember it was seven times on the torso and twice on the head.”

She was back at home, and learned of the attack when a local man called Leslie Dallas (who was later to die at the hands of the IRA, see below), called to say that two men were looking for her.

The men were from the UDR, and Wendy’s first thought was: “What has he done now?!”

“We sat on the sofa, and they started to say: ‘Your husband has been fatally wounded.’

“I said: ‘Well ... is he alright?’

“I wasn’t picking up the word ‘fatal’. I was picking up the word ‘wounded’.

“In my mind he was wounded, and they were there to take me to the hospital.

“It wasn’t registering. I just fixed my eyes on the clock.

“Then for some reason I said: ‘My mum’s only dead three weeks.’ And I went into hysterics.”

THE AFTERMATH:

Wendy said the other members of the lorry’s crew “must have all frozen in shock”.

The driver of the bin lorry came to the wake, and told the widow: "I'm so sorry. I thought they were going to shoot us all."

Ned died at the scene.

Wendy said no-one was ever arrested in relation to the attack.

She said "good, decent people were horrified and said they felt ashamed and it shouldn't have happened".

But the killers "seen him as a legitimate target – it didn't matter whether he'd been in it 20 years or eight weeks".

Wendy added: "Every year it's been the same. I hate the month of April. Mummy died on the 4th of April.

"The wedding anniversary is the 14th of April. And then Ned was murdered on the 26th."

For the anniversary, she went to the grave and released balloons in his memory.

"I still feel the loss," said Wendy, who still lives in the same house and did not remarry.

"Why me? Why has it happened to me? What did we ever do that we deserved this to happen?"

"This is what life is. I feel very sad that you're just a number nowadays.

"You're forgot about. You're talked about for three, four days. Nobody really cares – only your family.

"You'll get the odd person say: 'Oh – I mind that happened.' But it doesn't really mean anything to them because they're not really living with it every day."

POSSIBLE CULPRITS:

Wendy, said no-one was ever arrested over the murder.

However, she believes her husband's killers were themselves later shot dead.

"It's hearsay," she said.

"But I wanted to believe that, because it was easier. Do you understand what I mean?"

"It's easier to cope with knowing they've been got for it, than that person maybe walking into the surgery and being sweet and nice to me at work, and they are the one who murdered my husband."

According to the book 'Lost Lives', police said one of these weapons had been used in another fatal IRA attack in the small village; namely, it had been used to kill Leslie Dallas,

Austin Nelson, and Ernest Rankin on March 7, 1990. A rifle in the car had also been used to kill Derek Ferguson on April 9, 1991.

The IRA claimed Mr Dallas and Mr Ferguson were UVF members, but 'Lost Lives' says the police – and UVF itself – rejected these claims.

'Lost Lives' and the University of Ulster-based 'Conflict Archive on the Internet' both list all four of those dead men as being Protestant civilians.

To add further to the tragedy, Wendy's own uncle Jack Scott had also been killed by the IRA in Ardboe, east Tyrone, in 1979. An off-duty police reservist, he was shot whilst working on a milk tanker.

In addition to these deliberate killings, one of Ned's childhood friends had died in a car crash. His sister Alison Gibson was also killed in a traffic accident.

ⁱ Wendy Gibson Testimony

ⁱⁱ Inquest File pg 13 Witness Deposition 14/12/88

ⁱⁱⁱ Inquest File pg 15 Witness Deposition 14/12/88

^{iv} Inquest File pg 19 Witness Deposition 14/12/88

^v Inquest File pg Witness Deposition 14/12/88

^{vi} Inquest File pg 12 Witness Deposition 14/12/88

^{vii} <https://www.newsletter.co.uk/news/latest-news/widow-recalls-murder-of-young-binman-30-years-ago-1-8488941>

^{viii} Inquest File pg 27 Witness Deposition 14/12/88

^{ix} Inquest File pg 23 Witness Deposition 14/12/88

^x Inquest File pg 25 Witness Deposition 14/12/88

^{xi} https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Provisional_IRA_East_Tyrone_Brigade